

REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE WORKING GROUP ON FISH-AGGREGATING DEVICES

On June 7, 1999, the Working Group on Fish-Aggregating Devices met in Guayaquil, Ecuador, chaired by Lic. Mara Murillo Correa, of Mexico, with the objective of analyzing possible measures to be taken to regulate the use of fish-aggregating devices (FADs) in the tuna fishery in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO), in accordance with the Resolution approved by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) at its 62nd meeting in October 1998.

Dr. Robin Allen, of the IATTC staff, presented to the Working Group the analysis of the various proposals made by the delegations at the previous meeting on possible measures for regulating the use of FADs. Dr. Allen explained the methodology and the various sources of the information used for the analysis, and gave a thorough explanation of the possible effects of the proposed measures.

Dr. Allen summarized the resolution on this matter taken by the IATTC at its 61st Meeting in June 1999.

With regard to the document presented by the IATTC staff, some delegations asked that the analysis include the possible effects not only on the catches of the various species of tuna, but also on their biomass, in order to give a full picture of the impacts on the sustainable management of the fisheries. They also noted the need to carry out the analysis with modifications of the sensitivity of the variables, as well as the uncertainty by interval.

Dr. Alain Fonteneau, of the European Community, presented data on fisheries on floating objects in various oceans of the world, as well as some of the regulations which have been implemented in order to reduce the catches and discards of juvenile tuna.

M. en C. Rafael Solana and Dr. Michel Dreyfus, of Mexico, presented analyses of the effects of the various fishing methods (on dolphins, schoolfish, and floating objects) in the last five years, with particular reference to catches of juveniles, average sizes of the fish caught, bycatch of other species, and the need to regulate the fishery on floating objects, which produces the greatest catches of juveniles and bycatch species.

After the scientific information was presented, the Working Group discussed possible measures to be recommended for consideration by the IATTC.

From the discussions there appears to be a general consensus on the need to establish management measures for the fishery on FADs, in particular to reduce the catch of juvenile tuna (bigeye and yellowfin).

However, some delegations commented that the information available is insufficient for taking regulatory measures on the use of FADs and asked that the IATTC staff carry out further studies on the matter. It was also suggested that the question of bycatch be dealt with in the Working Group on Bycatch.

On the other hand, some delegations indicated that, even though there were some additional questions, the information presented by the IATTC staff was sufficient for taking decisions, since many of the hypotheses analyzed give clear indications of the effects on the populations, and that measures should be adopted taking the precautionary principle into account, and these could be ratified, refined or eliminated as the information required by the various delegations became available.

Some delegations stressed that any measures established be complete, in order to ensure the sustainability of the various fisheries for tunas in the EPO.

In this regard, there was general agreement on the need for compliance with the agreements on limits on fishing capacity.

Regarding the measures to be established, the Working Group discussed, but did not reach a consensus on, the following:

- Application of the precautionary approach.
- Reaffirming the resolution on bigeye, adopted during the 61st Meeting of the IATTC, but with a reduction of the maximum catch of bigeye by the purse-seine fishery to less than 25,000 tons. In this respect, and considering the analysis presented by the IATTC staff, a reduction of the quota to 30,000 tons was proposed.
- Establish a limit on the depth of FADs. Some delegations requested that the IATTC staff study this matter further.
- Limit the number of sets on floating objects to around 2,300.
- Establish a limit on the number of FADs that a vessel can carry.
- Analyze the effects of the use of bait with FADs.
- Limit the size of vessels operating in the EPO.
- Reiterate and, if applicable, clarify regulations governing tender vessels, in order to avoid interpretations of how they can be used.
- Seasonal area closures, in particular in Areas 4 and 5 and possibly Area 2.
- Ban on discards.
- Place observers on vessels under 400 metric tons fishing on FADs.
- Research and develop technology to avoid the capture of small fish and/or release them if they are captured.
- Combine some of these measures, as for example:
 - Limit the number of sets on floating objects to the levels recorded during the 1991-1992 period.
 - Seasonal bans on the use of FADs in Areas 4 and 5.
 - Reduce the maximum bigeye quota to 30,000 tons.

Finally, Dr. Joseph, Director of the IATTC, commented on the importance of the work done by the Commission staff, as well as the scientific information currently available, which should allow decisions to be taken on regulating the use of FADs, and avoid a situation such as that which the fishery faced in the 1970s. In this regard he noted that the current situation of increasing use of FADs was very similar to that which arose at the end of the 1970s, when the fishing effort on floating objects increased and led to a substantial reduction in the catches of tuna.